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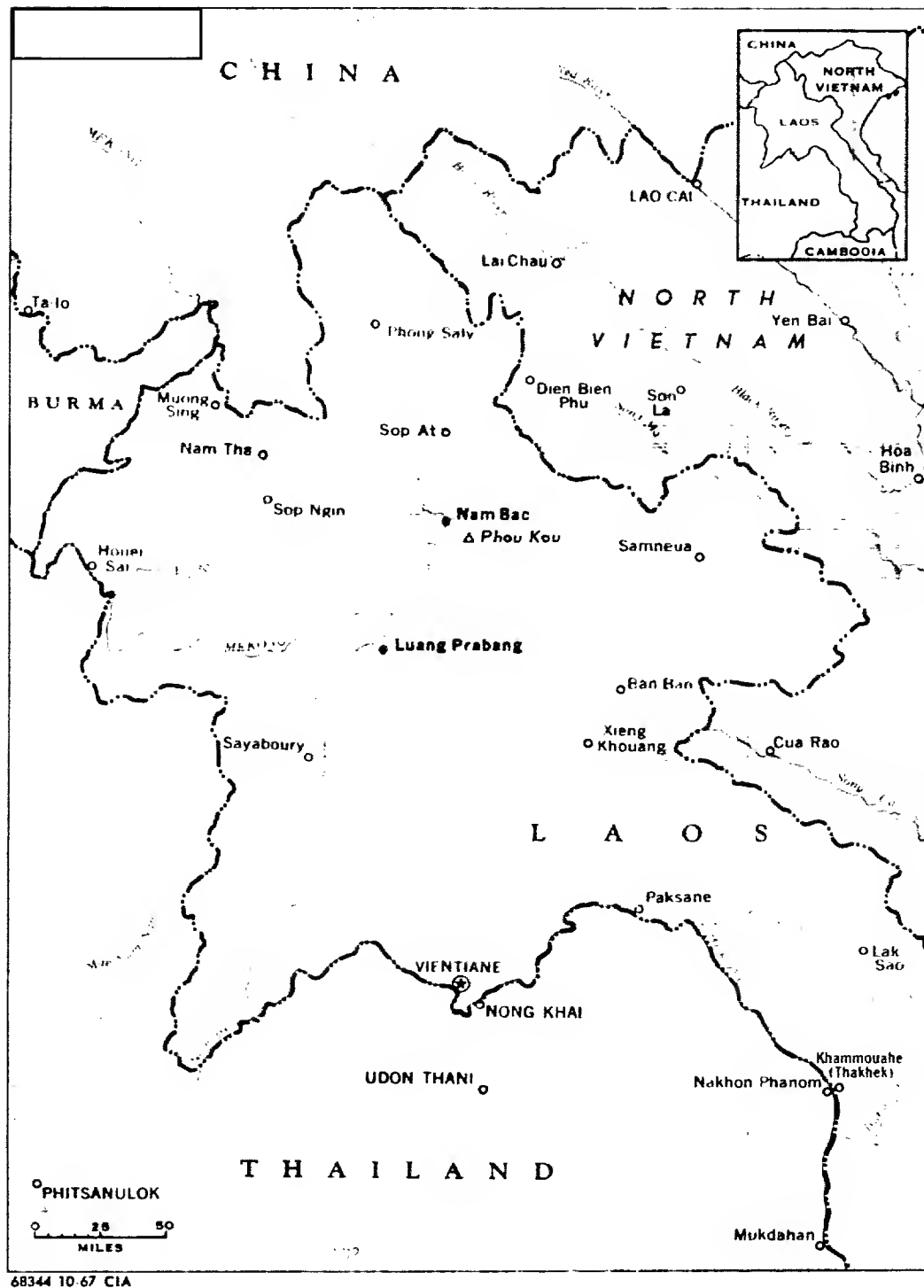
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Laos: The Communists are increasing military pressure against government positions in northern Laos.

Enemy harassment of the government's outlying defense positions in the Nam Bac area in recent days has resulted in heavy friendly casualties. The Communists have hit government artillery positions on Phou Kou--a strategic hill overlooking the Nam Bac airstrip--with heavy mortar fire but have not followed up with a ground assault. The loss of Phou Kou would seriously undermine the government's key position in Nam Bac.

The enemy also routed elements of two government battalions defending positions southeast of Phou Kou on 12 October. The airstrip at Nam Bac apparently was attacked on 15 October, although it is still open.

The enemy's recent attacks have upset plans for a government offensive to relieve the pressure on Nam Bac, but army leaders in Vientiane appear determined to retain control of the base. Reinforcements have been moved into the area from southern Laos and at least nine government battalions are now strung out in the rugged hills around Nam Bac.

The army's determination illustrates the importance of the base, which protects the northern approaches to Luang Prabang. Since its capture last year, Nam Bac has become a major staging-point for government harassment and intelligence operations up to the North Vietnam border.

The Communists' intentions in the area are not yet clear, but it is doubtful that they are willing at this juncture to take the substantial losses that a direct assault on Nam Bac would entail. [REDACTED]

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NOTE

25X1 India: The resignation of leftist ministers from the governing coalition in Uttar Pradesh points up the instability of a number of Indian state governments. The resignations have left the Chief Minister without a dependable majority in the assembly of this, the most populous state in India. The regime's downfall may, however, be delayed by the inability of the opposition, primarily the Congress Party, to close ranks. In West Bengal, the state coalition government, which has appeared on the brink of falling for some weeks, remains in office primarily because politicians cannot agree on the next step. [REDACTED]

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